Aleister Crowley & Merlin Magick

KENNETH ANGER

'What I'm trying to do in my films is to generate something more than meets the eye; it's like an extra dimension and film is one of the mediums that can capture it. It's like changing your view point on life; playing tricks with time and playing tricks with a person's idea of who they are. A lot of it is like role-playing but then that's how I view life anyway . . . I think it is very important what colour and clothes you wear and on what day.'

This preoccupation with clothes and roles is a constant theme of Anger's. Pleasure Dome begins with the main figure rising and dressing; in Scorpio there are lingering shots at the beginning of the Angels zipping and buckling themselves into tight levis. None of the people in his films have any personality: 'They are forces, in other words I try to see through personalities to the archetype. That's why the people I choose for my films are always cast according to astrology, according to their signs, fire, air, earth and water. My high priest in Pleasure Dome was a Pisces and the Pan was Taurus . . . I'm interested in the aura or magnetism that people have, because that's what Magick is all about. It's a power that every person has if only they'd tune into it.' This explains Anger's concentration on objects like rings, boots, strings of jewels and especially the texture of materials. 'They are all talismanic; they are charged with power, the same way people are. It depends on how you look at them, how you interpret them; there's a fine balance between the very spiritual and the very profane interpretation; it's easy to tip into the monkey or fetish side, which is the interpretation: getting hung up on some object.

This is particularly what Scorpio Rising is about. 'The film is a reflection of sacred things and what happens when they become profane and strong in their own way. Like in the initiation into the motor-cycle club even though they don't know what they're doing they're mimicking things that are really quite profound. Kids who dig this don't know anything about Africa or voodoo, but I believe in the collective subconscious: It's like a stream which winds through all of us . . . Scorpio is me being as invisible as possible as an artist; just moving around events that really happened. All my people are real on Scorpio, there are no people pretending to be leather motor-cycle types. Even in fancy dress films the people are still as I see them and how they see themselves.

In Rio you have people who live in shanty towns and save up all year for the fab costume that they will wear for the Carnival, and that's what they live for the whole year. For that spangled moment: and during the Carnival when they're all dressed up, that's really them, it's not them when they are working, sweeping the street or doing somebody's washing'.

FUNERAL DIRGE

The role playing and identity theme again. But there is yet another thread woven into the tapistry of Scorpio Rising. 'In 1962 we finally left the Piscean age behind and moved into the Age of Aquarius. In a way the film was a funeral dirge. You see Scorpio is the sign of sex and death and the film was a funeral to see out the Piscean Age. It also in a subtle way is about restriction, because the crucial thing is fighting to be free. The theme is death and the lead actor died after the film started. He crashed into a wall at 80 mph. He was a Scorpio. It's always very carefully chosen.'

Misfortunes and disasters seem to dog many of Anger's projects. In 1967 he placed an obituary in the 'Village Voice' mourning his own death as a film-maker. It followed the theft of the only copy of a half-completed film Lucifer Rising plus a large amount of equipment. He rose again however and went on to make Invocation of my Demon Brother. This was the film of a particular ceremony, held during the Autumn Equinox in San Francisco. I just performed it once and everything was built for it and then destroyed when the ceremony was over . . .' The film, which is a rapid collage of magic rites centering round the ceremony a kaleidoscope of powerful images, has an almost subliminal looped film running continuously through it, showing soldiers leaping from a helicopter and setting off for war.

The film is a recognition of the demonic forces that are working in the world right now. The film reflects the Vietnam war, and the disgorging from the helicopter of those gung-ho young soldiers, representing the holocaust of sacrifice, the swathe that Chronos is cutting through this generation. I view the victims on both sides as human sacrifices served up for Belial and Moloch, ancient war gods who have established themselves on earth; they cry out for blood and they get it as they always have done. The red flag lying over there is a beautiful colour; to some, freshly spilled blood is the most pure colour there is.' The music for Invocation, was composed and played on a Moog Synthesiser by Mick Jagger; its rhythmic repetitive discord, counter-points exactly the mood of the film. 'He was great. He did it for me in one night; we just climbed on the same wavelength.'

LUCIFER

In a career littered with abandoned projects, the film with the most chequered history, and the one which Anger is most determined to make is Lucifer Rising. It's a film on which he's engaged at the moment here in London, and which he hopes to have completed in the coming year, with sound track being provided by The Lucifer Brothers Brodcasting Corporation . . 'My film Lucifer died. He thought he could fly and fell from a roof, and he almost could, that's the amazing thing. He could levitate just, but between that and flying there's quite a gap. He was wanted too much on the 'other side'. He was only five years old, and after I decided anyway it was a bit too heavy a trip to put on a kid that age. He was a beautiful child

with platinum blond hair which his parents never cut, since he was born, so it was shoulder length.

My second Lucifer, a Scorpio, was Bobby Beausoleil who was one of Manson's family. He's presently in San Quentin on death row. He freaked out after he left me. I never met Manson and don't know what Bobby got into with him, obviously Bobby had his dark side and that took over. I'm sorry about it as I chose him because he was a powerful cat, he has that kind of extra dimensional quality that comes across on film. But Bobby got the message wrong. He went on an ego trip and I just couldn't handle him.

Leslie Huggins who is going hopefully, to be my new Lucifer is a fire sign, an Aries. He used to work on a steel mill in Middlesborough, which is a strong start for a fire sign. I hope it's third time lucky. 'Like Scorpio Rising, Lucifer Rising is about several things. I'm an artist working in Light and that's my whole interest really. Lucifer is the Light God, not the devil, that's a Christian Slander. The devil is always other people's gods. Lucifer has appeared in other of my films I haven't labelled him as such but there's usually a figure or a movement in those films which is my 'Lucifer' moment . . . I'm showing actual ceremonies in the film; what is performed in front of the camera won't be a re-enactment and the purpose will be to make Lucifer rise . . . It's the birthday party for the Aquarian Age . . . the Everything I've been saying so far has been leading up to this. I've been exploring myself and now I've got to communicate it. Lucifer is the Rebel Angel behind what's happening in the world today. His message is that the Key of Joy is disobedience.' That's a heavy statement.

STORY OF O

One of the abandoned projects that Anger has, no definite plans to return to is the story of the notorious French pornography classic recently translated into English, 'The Story of O', but the events behind the film sound like a movie plot themselves.

'I chose a Hugenot girl to play the part of 'O' at that time her father was the Minister for Finance but she did this without her father knowing. It was like a private sex trip for us. It grew but of his strict protestant background. She was supposed to be out taking harpsicord lessons and she was coming to make my blue movie. But we had to stop because

Kenneth Anger is a magician first and a film maker second; he is a poet in the most expensive medium celluloid is his talisman. In the last 20 years he has only made four films none longer than 40 minutes, but these, together with fragments from two uncompleted films, have been sufficient to place him in the forefront of today's independent film makers. His guru is Aleister Crowley and the powerful archetypal forces that fascinated Crowley, pervade all his work. Besides being compelling explorations of man's subconscious and the hidden powers that influence him, Anger's work is technically brilliant and startlingly original. His use of rapid montage is built up intensely, his sensitivity to colours and texture, and the of doubled or triple superimpositions all continue to make his films rich visual and emotional experiences. Although his films abound with explicit and detailed magical references and concepts, the energy of his images is such that they can easily be understood on an intuitive level. Their literal references become secondary.

David Redjom

one of the girl brought along her handsome boyfriend to be in some of the scenes and without my knowing it he was one of the Peugot kidnappers who held young Eric Peugot to ransom for a mint, in 1960. This guy was sleeping with Madame Peugot and the whole kidnapping was a set up; she put the kid out in the garden at a certain time and he just picked him up, and kept him for the weekend. It's a very French happening; like a Chabrol movie.'

Like many film-makers, Anger spends little time seeing other people's films and as a true magician has little but contempt for current occult fads and horror films, which he finds trite with no conception of evil. His heroes are the early film-makers, like Eisenstein or Lumiere. 'One of the most unknown film-makers is Lumiere, who grouped a number of anonymous camera men working in the 1890's under his direction. They went out all over the world, like the courts of China and Japan and filmed in absolute wonder. Seeing some of the processions and ceremonies they filmed is like looking into a crystal ball and watching something from another age. And then Melies has always been my mentor; he showed how you could create a world of imagination with limited means and very little bread. His sets and costumes were just canvas and paper, but for me his trip to the moon is a thousand times more fabulous than 2001; the Man in the Moon is there, who's the guy we really want to meet.'

The creation of an imaginary world with limited means is precisely what Anger does, and this makes him an artist in the traditional sense; a fact which he recognises. 'In a way I see my films emerging from certain styles of painting, like the mannerists for instance, there is always an element of the joker in them, of game playing where the vision is just a bit too ecstatic or just on the edge of something.' For him Chaos is a nutrient to be drawn from, and the material then ordered to reflect the artist's will and view point. Not for him the a-causal chance random recordings that characterises Warhol for example. 'He's Mr. Negative. He's capturing rot. Putrescence is one stage of alchemy and he's capturing that, but I wouldn't fancy staying in the putrefaction chamber myself, because Warhol's definitely a down trip like taking barbs. Everything's a drag, it's real enough, but it's not my scene at all.'

PLEASURE DOME

Probably Anger's most complete imaginary world, is the one he created in his earliest longer film, Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome. It's dominant colour is deep red, the warm feeling of which envelopes the audience in a dream-like succession of incredible images. The film can be read on different levels, but the level it's meant to be read on is Initiation. 'All my films are concerned with some kind of exploration into inner space. In it, masked and painted figures move through an uncertain landscape. Each represents some deity or force: there is Pan, The Great Beast, (who Crowley identified with) Osiris, Lilith and others. Often they give objects to each other in a form of communion, and it's in fact the tranposition of a ritual in Anger's Brotherhood, 'A . A . .' which was formed by Crowley. Then a sacred liquid is brought (possibly made from mushrooms) and after drinking it the gods become ecstatic.

The film was made in 1954 and the control, imagination, and use of special effects was far ahead of anything made at that time; even today the commercial cinema hasn't caught up. 'I've seen echoes of it ever since '54, but originally it was only shown to limited audiences, it was one of the first trip movies; I know Fellini saw it and picked up some ideas for 'Satyricon' from it. 'Anger's films, like those of many other underground film makers, are taking films closer to music. His films can be viewed any number of times, each one revealing something new. 'The way I like to show my films is to friends at home, something like Pleasure Dome can maybe seem slow in public, but when you're just relaxed laying around a bit stoned, it's fine, and that's the way it should be seen.'

In keeping with his admiration for Eisenstein, Anger has taken up one of his idea's that of creating a close interaction between the images and the music (none of his films use dialogue). This is most blatant in Scorpio Rising where late '50's and early '60's numbers like 'Torture' 'Point of No Return' and 'Wipe Out' are obviously directly related to the action. But the tinny, jerky rhythm of the songs balance, perfectly, the heavy intensity of the images, and by their triteness make the figures all the more ominous. In Eaux d'Artifice, a beautiful film, shot in blue and white, of water cascading and flowing in an artificial garden, the light baroque music expresses the images exactly: 'the link is like that between ballet and music. When I listened to the Vivaldi I felt fountains, I saw fountains, and then I found this place and they fell together. As so often it's a case of synchronicity. When I find the music I dig it often turns out to be what I need. That's the way it was for Pleasure Dome. When I started the film I had no idea I was going to be using Janacek's Slavonic Mass, but as I was making it and casting around for music it just turned up.'

VERTICAL FILM

Another of Anger's interests linking him with the early greats is with Griffiths' idea of vertical composition. 'My whole trip is like the Shivalic lifeforce which is in essence phallic worship. I've tried the vertical screen, in one film on Egypt of obilisks and temples and everything goes up and up. I showed it once and the film caught fire, as the only way I could run it was with the projector on its side and the oil ran out. I'm no technician but I'm sure you could fix something up with prisms and things. I would like a tall screen like used in painting composition. Broad screens are too passive, there's something too much pulled out, there's too much horizon and I want more sky. Griffith used vertical composition in Intolerance during the attack on the walls of Babylon. The Canadians experimented with it at Montreal World's Fair . . . and they had somebody rowing a boat on a vertical screen, and they'd toss a flower into the water, and on the floor there was another screen and it would fall into the water down there and you could see it reflected.'

Anger himself has a three screen version of Inauguration of the Pleasure Dome, although they are arranged horizontally. This allows for an interplay between the three, which gives the film a much greater feeling of movement.

MERLIN MAGICK

But unlike some experimental film makers, Anger's technical innovations are always firmly subordinate to the content and aim of the film, which is ultimately always magical. It is impossible to really understand or appreciate him, without accepting this as the sincere basis of all his work. 'My guru is Alaister Crowley. I consider him one of the greatest Englishmen of all times, who has been completely misunderstood. I am convinced his time will come; for his message, that we are all moving through into a new era and must wake-up to it, has to get through Lucifer Rising is summed up by the poem of Crowley's printed here; the film will be an actual ceremony in itself, capturing magical forces on celluloid, if only for a while. I'm drawing on celluloid, its my talisman. I capture certain elements but I have no illusions.

My films lie in the area I call Merlin Magick. As enchantment they will last for a while then they will vanish; its like writing on water.